Using RSS Feeds and e-Alerts to Increase User Awareness of E-resources in Library and Information Centers

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Abstract

Library professionals do not have sufficient time to conduct comprehensive online searches on regular basis to locate the latest information relevant to areas of specialty of their users. Despite an increasing availability of online content and a continuing need to have the latest information easily accessible, many special libraries are facing reduced resources, hours, and personnel for this service. The Library and Information Science professionals are forced to use some automated alert service about the recent e-resources added in the databases relevant to their users. RSS Feeds and e-Alerts can be used as a current awareness service tool in a library environment.

1. Introduction

Information is a vital resource for all kinds of scientific activities and it is more important and essential in the field of advanced scientific and technological research. In technological research one needs to keep up-to-date in ones field of work, to interact with other peers and to monitor competitors and their achievements. The information professionals find it difficult to meet the information needs of their clientele due to the "Information over load". They have to adopt various tools and techniques offered by the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) from time to time and to satisfy information needs of the users. Library professionals are facing tight budgets and reduced staff and are forced to find out innovative ways to provide value added services to their users. Incorporating new technologies into library services helps the library professionals efficiently offer these value added services to their users. Internet offers many tools and techniques to capture current information and disseminate them among users. The 'RSS Feeds and e-Alert' are such tools, which helps to alert the users about recent information.

This paper focuses on the use of RSS Feeds and e-Alerts as current awareness service tool for value added library services and as a tool for marketing the library services.

2. Need for RSS Feeds and e-Alerts services in libraries

There are numerous RSS Feeds and e-Alerting services available from a variety of scientific databases, electronic journals and electronic books on the Internet for free. These kinds of services are still not well utilized by many R&D libraries supporting scientific disciplines. Since one of the important roles of R&D libraries is to promote and provide instruction in the use of electronic resources, it is evident that of libraries need to play a pivotal role in developing awareness about the evolving applications of scientific RSS Feeds and e-Alerts. Most people are becoming familiar with using RSS Feeds and e-Alerts to read news items. RSS Feeds can also be used to offer additional library services via the library web site. These feeds can be used to deliver web content to targeted user groups who have specific information needs. In the special library this information may include updated guidelines, current awareness services, table of contents etc. Selecting, evaluating and organizing this information in a central location saves precious time of targeted audience.

More and more libraries have now begun to provide RSS Feeds of new books catalogued as they arrive in the libraries. They also subscribe to a number of electronic databases and electronic journals that provide RSS Feeds. In order to keep them abreast of new books or new research, the scientific community will need to get familiar with this

technology. This will help them to integrate new knowledge into their research project that they are working on.

3. What is RSS Feed?

Simply put, RSS is an XML-based format to share web site content. An excellent definition of it is provided by Whatis.com (searchWebServices.com) [1]:

RSS (RDF Site Summary – formerly called Rich Site Summary) is a method of describing news or other Web content that is available for "feeding" (distribution or syndication) from an online publisher to Web users. RSS is an application of the Extensible Markup Language (XML) that adheres to the World Wide Web Consortium's Resource Description Framework (RDF). Originally developed by Netscape for its browser's Netcenter channels, the RSS specification is now available for anyone to use.

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary; it allows a producer of information to broadcast the information across Intranet or the Internet. It is created using Extended Markup Language (XML). RSS Feeds can be read through a RSS Reader. It is a new technology, it is easy to use, and it will keep users informed of all the latest news. RSS Feed is a way of being alerted to recently published information on the Internet and valuable means of communication to keep track of the ever increasing flow of new information.

RSS Format

RSS feed is an XML file containing a list of items or entries. These are identified by links and can have some metadata associated with it. The most basic metadata for an entry includes a title for the link and a description of it. For example, a simple entry might look like;

```
<item>
<title>Title of an item in feed</title>
<link>http://link.domain.com/item</link>
<description>
This is the description of the item.
</description>
</item>
```

How RSS works?

Publishing of information through RSS system is rather simple:

- The information is published in RSS format on some web pages, which one wants to be displayed and used by others. These pages constitute the RSS feed.

- RSS feed is actually a XML file. It is mostly generated dynamically from Back end database. However it could be a static page. It consists of set of items of information. This file holds URL, title and summary of each item to display.

- A person, who wants to read the feed on its computer, uses an RSS reader or its browser and just adds the feed with the proper command of its software.

- Normally a person aggregates a number of RSS feeds from various different sources in his software or online RSS services to stay in touch by reading just summaries of the items. URLs associated with items can be followed to view the actual information

- There is yet another way to use RSS Feeds from various providers. The content of the feeds can displayed from websites by running suitable scripts at web servers. When someone visits the website such scripts get activated. These exact RSS Feeds from providers' websites and display list of information items from extracted data with links to providers' pages.

How to create an RSS feed?

In practice you will perhaps never need to create an RSS Feed manually. For all practical purposes you will be using RSS Enabled content managers or some other tools to exact data from pages and generate Feeds. However let us look what all it takes to create an RSS Feed.

We know that RSS Feed is actually an XML file consisting of number of tags.

Main RSS tags

rss – it is used to mark the global container.
channel – is used to mark the distributing channel. It has several descriptive tags and holds one or several items

```
<rss version="2.0">
<channel>


</channel>
</rss>
```

Required tags for the channel

title. The title of the channel. Should contain the name.
link. URL of the website that provides this channel.
description. Summary of what the provider is.
one **item** tag at least, for the content.

```
<rss version="2.0">
<channel>
        <title>Xul</title>
        <link>http://www.xul.fr/</link>
        <description></description>
        <item>
        </item>
</channel>
</rss>
```

Optional tags for the channel

Language. The human language used for the text
Docs. Where to find doc for the format of the file, may be Harvard
webMaster. E-mail.
pubDate. Publishing date.
etc.

Items of the channel

Each **item** tag must hold these tags:
title. Title of the article.
link. The URL of the page.
description. Summary of the article.

> **<item>**
> **<title>**Xul news**</title>**
> **<link>**http://www.xul.fr/en-xml-rss.html**</link>**
> **<description>...** some text... **</description>**
> **</item>**

Example of complete RSS Document of Latest @ INFLIBNET Centre

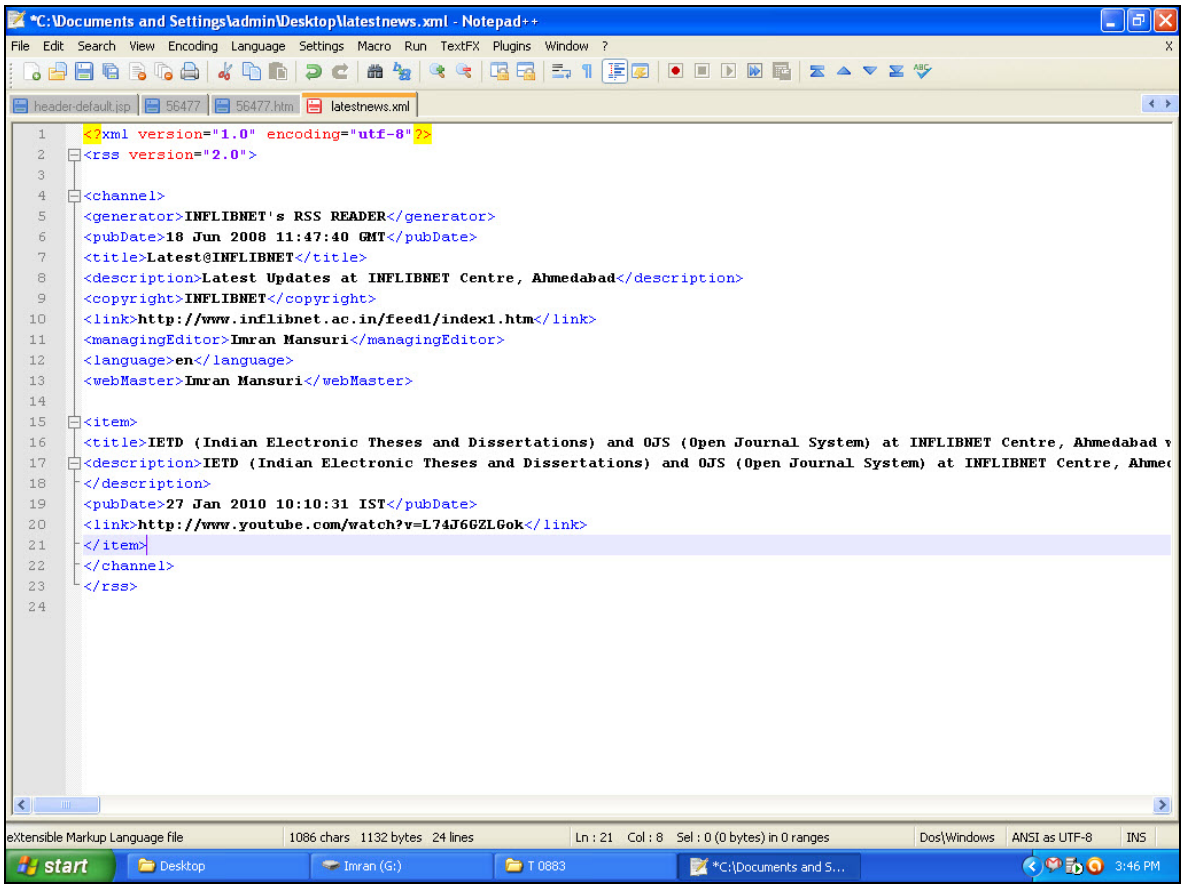

Figure 1

It might look like as below screen in Google Reader

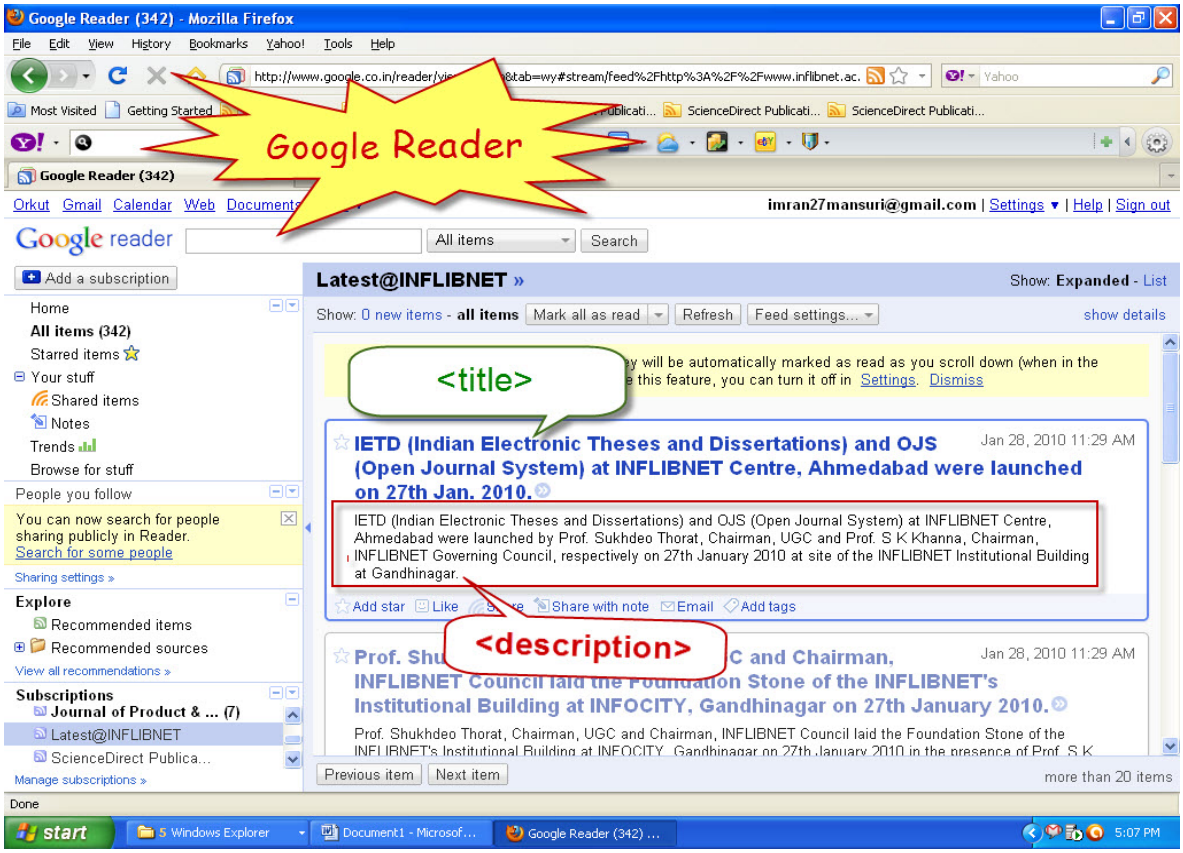

Figure 2

3.1 What is RSS Feed Reader?

RSS Readers are programs designed to gather information from many different sources and display them in a single interface. Most RSS Readers are available for free download from the Net. Some popular RSS Readers are Feed Reader, Newsgator, Feed Burner, Bloglines, Google Reader and the latest version of Internet Explorer.

3.2 Advantages of using RSS Feeds

RSS is very useful and has become very popular recently. It has advantages for Information Producers, Web Masters as well as for end Users of information.

Information producers can increase traffic to web site. They can push the Information to users using broadcast method. The information is automatically distributed to users as soon it is updated. The links to full-text information provides invisibility and increases it access. Information producers can save lot of time of webmasters by offering their information in RSS.

Webmasters can provide aggregated and valued aided information from various sources. They can target relevant information to specific users groups. They can provide latest information from various sources automatically without any special effort on their part. Information can be pulled from catalogs or databases, converted into an RSS feed and displayed on web pages.

Information Users can subscribe and unsubscribe RSS feeds at will. The desired information is delivered as long as the user remains subscribed to a feed. Users do not have to waste time in searching or browsing for his favorite site once he is subscribed to its RSS feed. RSS feeds are read through an RSS Reader or placed as web content.

Advertisements and spam are not included in feeds. Users remain current on the latest information.

3.3 Limitations of RSS Feeds

There are some limitations of RSS feeds. First one is that there are many sites That do not offer RSS feeds. So users have to visit these sites regularly. There is a time limit after which some feeds expire. The content of RSS feeds can be easily mixed and meshed to generate aggregated content. However copyright issues are not clear in such aggregated content. Application of proper selection criteria and evaluation of resources is required to get relevant content.

3.4 RSS Feed considerations

RSS Feeds for use as web content in a special library environment need to take into consideration the following criteria,

- Does the information contain in the feed meet the needs of the user?
- Resource availability – do they offer a feed? Not all information is offered through a feed?
- Do you have a subscription to the resource with IP authentication for full text?
- How often is the information in the feed updated?
- Does the RSS Feed expire?
- Another consideration is whether or not to use a specific feed has copyright permissions?

4. What is e-Alert service?

E-Alert is a service designed to keep the library users abreast of the latest information and scholarly work through early notification of forthcoming articles by e-mail. These kinds of e-Alert services are mostly free with a formal registration with the publishers' site.

4.1 Importance of e-Alert service in libraries

With the advent of Internet technology publishers began to publish their journals on the web and the number of such publications are growing. There are thousands of magazines and scholarly journals available in electronic form on Internet. The content of these journals are delivered to the public much earlier than print version by e-mail with links to citation or abstract or even to full text (access to full text is restricted to subscribers).

The shrinking library budget is inadequate to catch up with the growth of both the number of journals and their price. To manage such a situation and to get latest information, the e-Alert service is a boon to the information professionals, because most of the journal publishers are giving the e-Alert services free of cost. This enables users get the content pages of the journals.

4.2 Using e-Alert service as a CAS tool

The e-Alert services can be used as CAS tool in libraries to keep the library users informed of the latest journals contents. The timely availability of information will enhance creativity of the scientific community by right contact. According to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, "right contact means, contact between the right reader and the right book at the right time and in the right personal way". In this sense e-Alert service is an effective tool for establishing right contacts.

4.3 How to get the e-Alert service

To get free e-Alert services the user has to register by filling online registration form normally available from the publishers' web site. The online registration requires some basic information such as name, interested subject field, interested journals etc. Once the registration is complete e-mails will be automatically generated whenever new articles are posted on the publishers web site that matches the profile.

5. Major Electronic resources provide RSS Feeds & e-Alerts

Highwire Press Journals

A division of the Stanford University Libraries, Highwire Press hosts the largest repository of high impact, peer-reviewed content with 1129 journals. E-Alert service available for all the journals from Highwire Press. The user has to register to get the service figure 3.shows the RSS Feed for the journal Advances in Psychology Education from High Wire Press

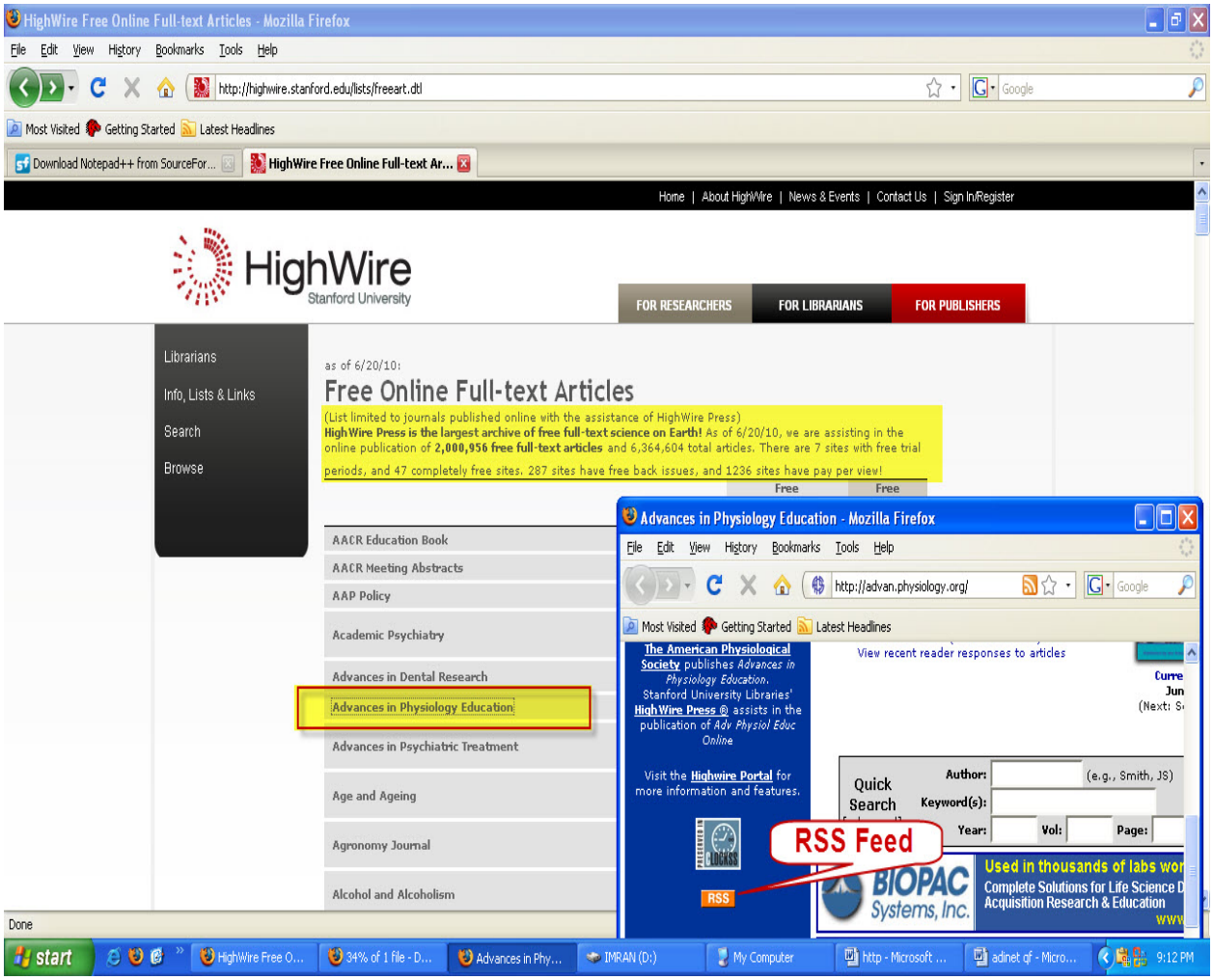

Figure 3: High Wire Press Journal Advances in Psychology Education RSS Feed

IEEE Explore

RSS Feeds for new issues of all IEEE journals are now available. Each journal title listed in IEEE Journals and Magazine has an RSS button that provides the feed URL. Each feed will contain the publication's title and table of contents with a link to IEEE explore. Figure 4 shows the RSS Feed for the journal IEEE Aerospace and Electronic Systems Magazine.

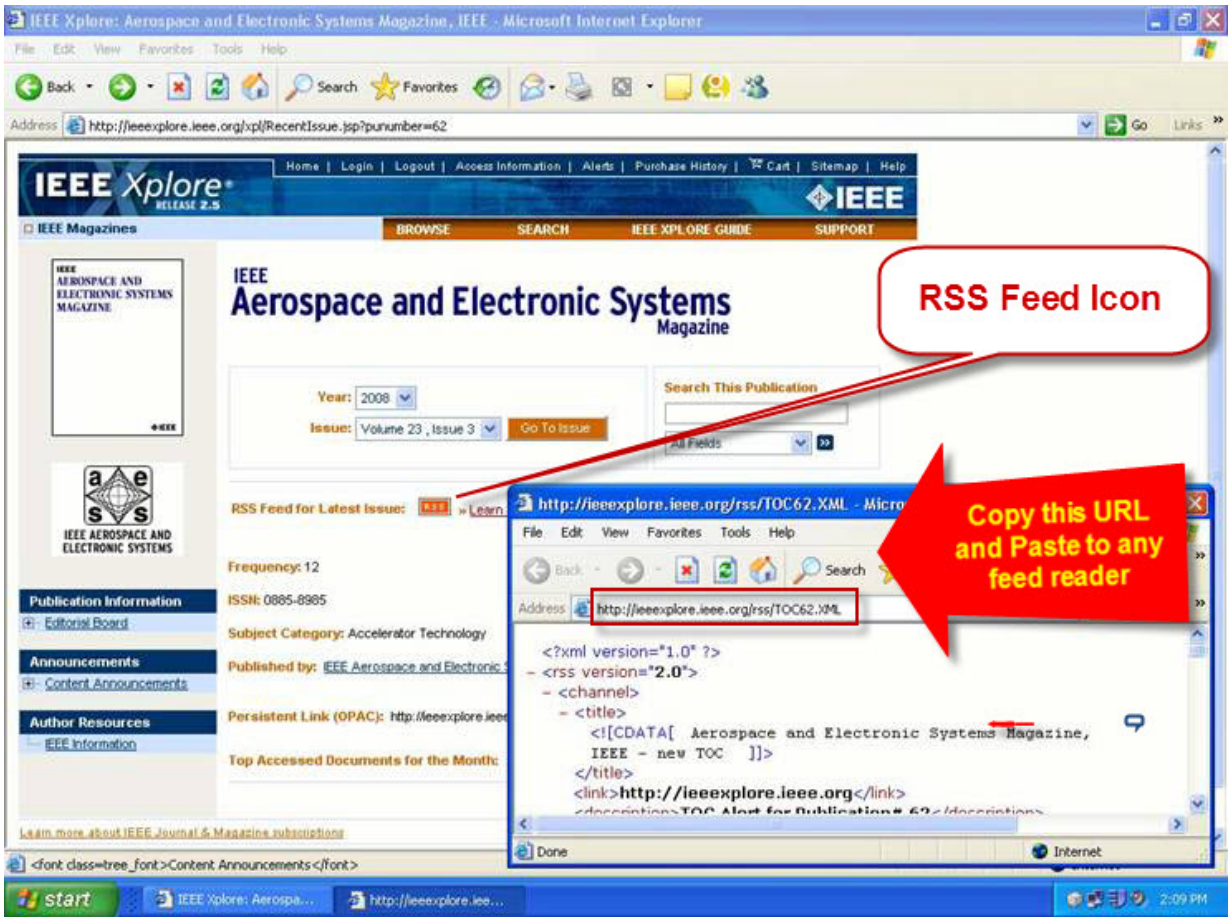

Figure 4: IEEE Xplore RSS Feed

IngentaConnect

IngentaConnect specializes in online journals in a wide variety of subject areas. It provides RSS Feeds from several journal titles. Users can sign up for feeds of the new journal issues of their choice. Figure 5 shows a sample IngentaConnect RSS Feed for a journal.

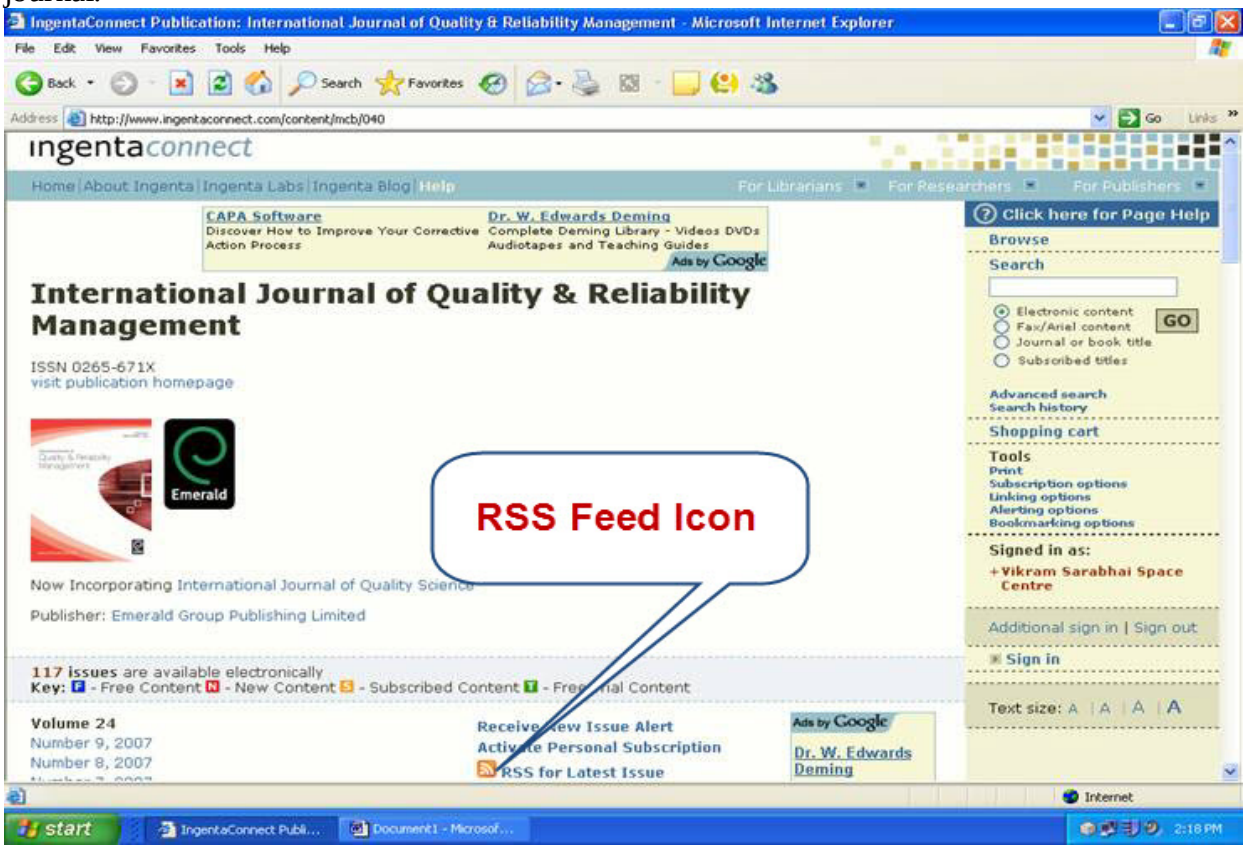

Figure 5: Ingenta Connect RSS Feed

Science Direct

Almost all the e-journals in Science Direct have RSS Feeds and e-Alert services. The RSS Feed links for each journal can be copied to any RSS Reader to get the e-Alert service after registration with Science Direct. Whenever a new journal issue is added the table of content of the issues will be sent to the user by e-mail. Figure 8 shows the RSS Feed for the journal 'Accident Analysis & prevention

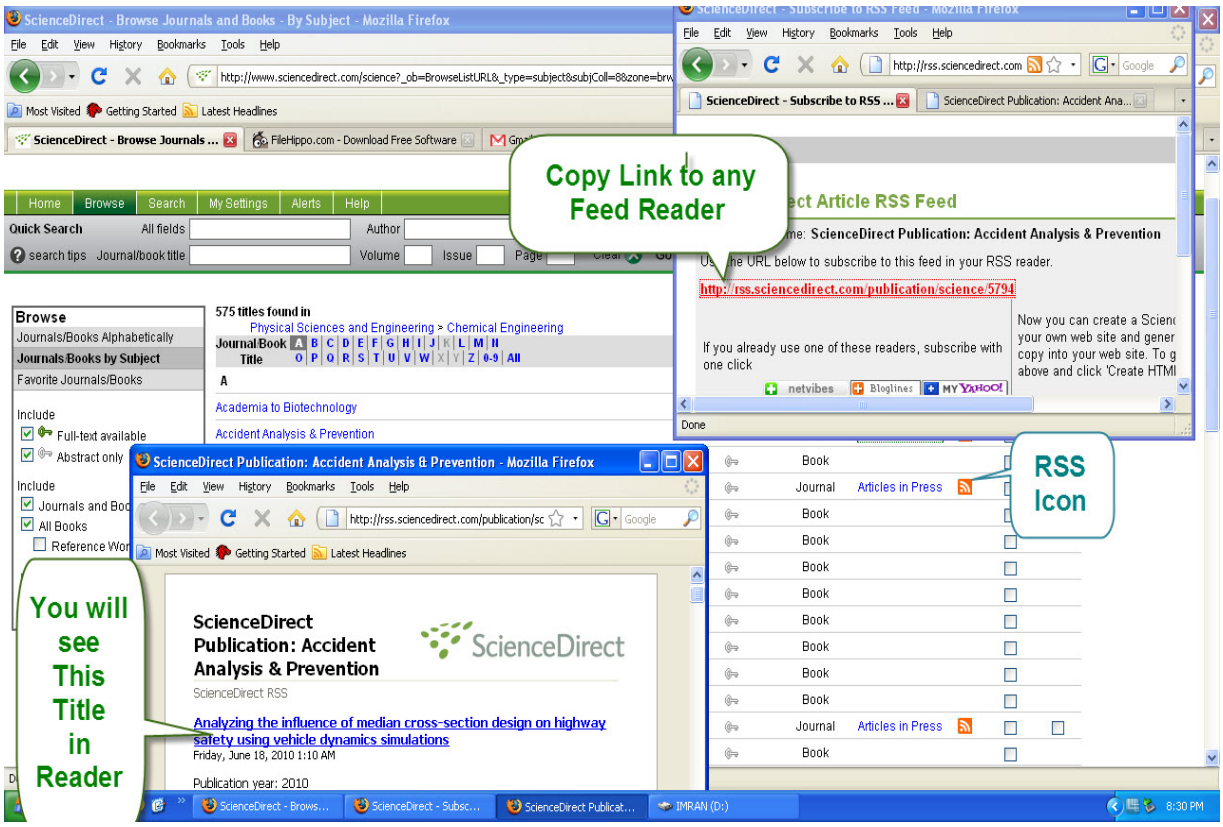

Figure 6: Science Direct RSS Feed

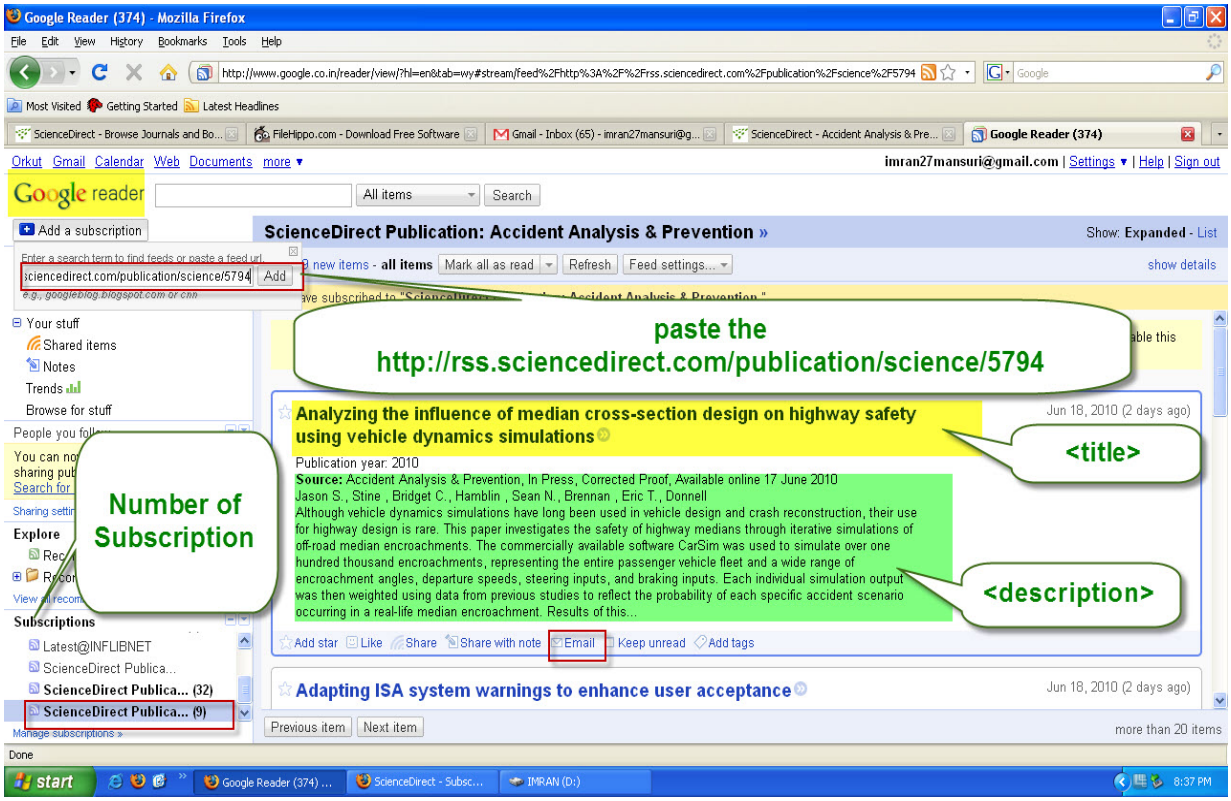

Figure 7: Science Direct RSS Feed link paste into Google Reader

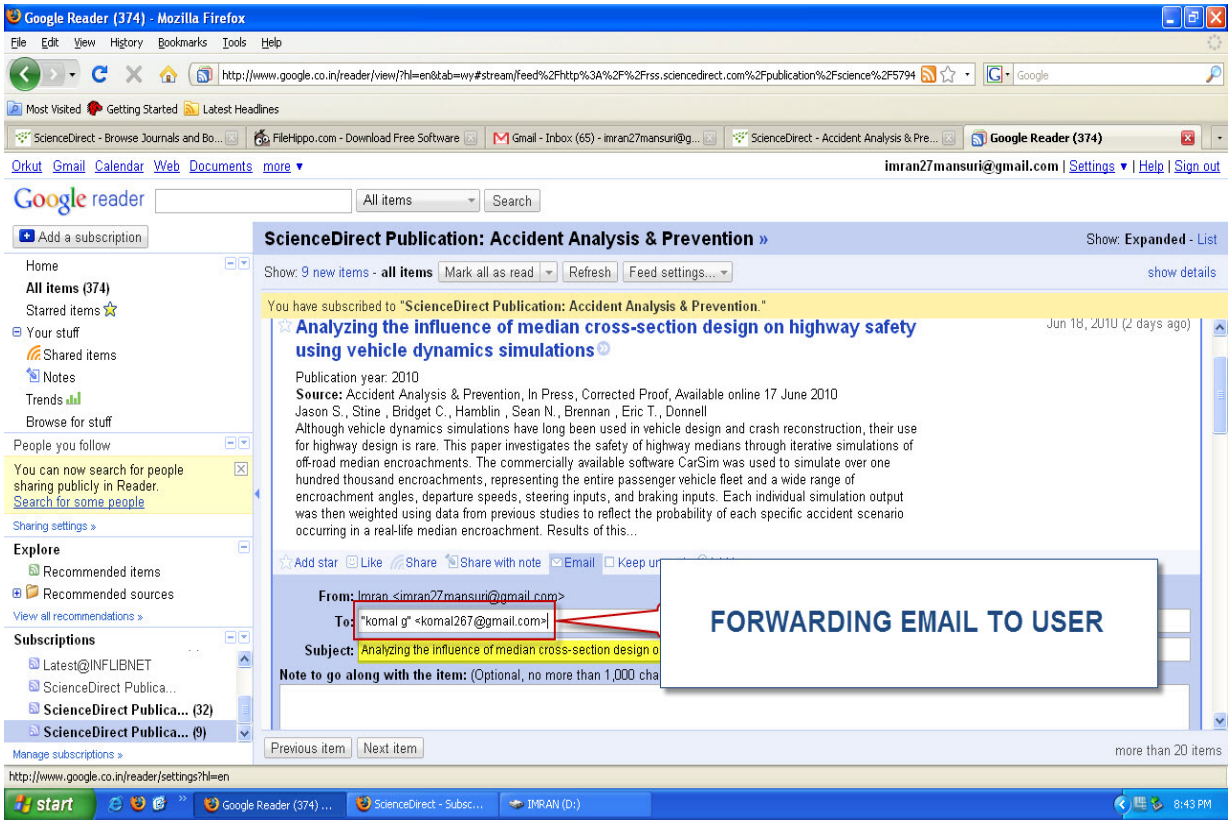

Figure 8: Google Reader with Email Interface

6. Utilization of RSS Feeds and e-Alerts in Library

Budgetary allocations for developing library collections are fast declining and publication costs of periodicals escalating. It is becoming more and more difficult for libraries and information centres world wide to sustain their growth. With such financial restraints, libraries have been forced to reduce the number of titles subscribed every year. However the needs and the demand of its users have remained the same or increased. Therefore in order to have a balance between the collection development and the users' needs the libraries are looking for innovative ways to satisfy the users. The RSS Feeds and e-Alerts can be used to satisfy the user needs effectively.

Content of new journal issues can be provided through RSS Feeds and e-Alerts to the library users for currently subscribed journals and even for the journals not subscribed by the library. Before providing the service, an exhaustive information requirement survey should be conducted among the library users. The library users have to give list of journals for which they require content page of new journal issues through RSS Feed and e-Alerts. Such kind of journal titles can be collected from the users and the librarians can register for RSS Feeds and e-Alerts. After receiving the RSS Feed and e-Alerts these can be forwarded to concern users by e-mail or user account can be created to send the e-Alert automatically to the users.

Google Reader is a good example for RSS Reader. Google provides a flexible and user-friendly interface for librarians to forward the journal article or content to the required users by e-mail. To forward the journal content the librarians need not have a separate e-mail account. Google Reader itself gives the e-mail facility to forward the content. The RSS Feed for **'Science Direct Publication Accident Analysis & prevention'** through Google Reader and option to forward the journal article by e-mail.

7. Conclusion

The RSS Feed and e-Alert services in libraries would equip the library and information professionals to meet the needs of their customers by providing fast and quality service provided one gears up to use the freely available services to enhance the professional capability. The shrinking library budget is no longer adequate to catch up with growth both in number and price of journals. To tide over the situation the free RSS Feeds and e-Alert services are helpful to a large extent. In today's IT oriented world L&IS professionals have to adopt the latest technological tools to prove and stabilize their role as information providers.

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